

Texas Farmers Union

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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT



February 13, 2003

The Honorable Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman
14 St Independence SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

03-4215746
AMS

Dear Secretary Veneman:

Last May President Bush signed the farm bill into law. Included in the law is a national country-of-origin labeling provision long sought by farmers, ranchers, and consumer groups. It requires that, effective September 2004, all fruits, vegetables, peanuts, meats, and fish be labeled with the country of origin on grocery store shelves.

Now, implementation of country of origin labeling, despite widespread support from producers and consumers, is threatened by the release of unsupported data by the USDA. In the Federal Register Notice dated November 21, 2002, 67 Fed. Reg. 7205-7206, USDA sought emergency approval of rules to assist in gathering information on country-of-origin labeling during the "voluntary" labeling program period. The request includes cost estimates that are unsupportably high and based on flawed assumptions about food industry practices. Moreover, the estimate fails to include a benefit analysis. The cost benefit studies that accompanied the implementation of nutritional labeling in the early 1990s provide the analytical standards that USDA should follow.

Regrettably, the release of these unsupported cost estimates could mislead members of Congress and undermine support for the planned 2004 implementation of the mandatory phase of the labeling law. The good news about labeling is that existing government regulations and standard marketing practices already cover a majority of the industry expenses associated with it, something ignored in the USDA estimates.

Americans for Country of Origin Labeling will continue to work to ensure that the new labeling law is successfully implemented. There are practical and cost-effective methods for implementing this important new law that will benefit consumers and agricultural producers. We would like you to join us in urging USDA to integrate country of origin labeling into pre-existing systems currently used in the food and agriculture sector, to require that a competent study be performed by third party researchers on costs and benefits, and to minimize the burden on the American food producer to the greatest extent practicable.

Thank you for your attention and concern for successful implementation of country of origin labeling which helps American consumers and those American producers who provide food for American consumers.

Sincerely, *Wes Sims*

Wes Sims, President
Texas Farmers Union

Cc: Secretary of Agriculture